

## History of “The Sunset Group” Amateur Radio Club

Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties, Calif.

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What is now “The Sunset Group” was initiated in 1975 by four Conrock Corporation (the “rock company” in Azusa) big-rig truck drivers, who were amateur radio operators. The four were **Jay Hanawalt** (WB6SZE, who still contributes significantly to the Club), **Jim MacRea** (WB6RUV, who attends club meetings still, and can be heard on the repeater once in a while), **Bill Shoulders** (WA6RUT, who is now an inactive member of the club), and **Dick Thorpe, Jr.** (WB6OOQ, who has since moved out of Southern California).

Shortly after the Club’s initial formation by these four, a couple of additional amateurs joined the group. They included **Dick Thorpe** (WB6GOH, WB6OOQ’s father), who was affectionately known throughout the Southern California VHF/UHF amateur radio community as the “Grumpy Old Ham”. Dick was greatly responsible for much of the Club’s overall philosophy as well as contributing his vast technical talents to the Club’s beginning. He passed away in September, 1982.

This small group had one major goal: they were interested in establishing their own repeater on the 220 MHz band to get away from some of the “excessive” and unpleasant activity on 2 meters.

In 1976, these founding fathers became the “Board of Directors” of a new organization that they called the “North Alta Loma Repeater Club” – NARC. They wrote the first Club constitution, which has been modified slightly only once since, and then only to bring some of the wording up to current times. Shortly after this “official” beginning, **Mike Cherry** (WA6CEA) and **Rich McDonald** (WB0NRE) joined the Board of Directors of NARC; they are still active members in the Club.

A repeater was home-brewed from a Midland 13-509 transceiver and was put on the air in 1976 at Jay Hanawalt’s (WB6SZE) house in Upland at 25th Street and Mountain Avenue. The builders of this original machine must have done a good job, because it remained on the air for ten years!

In September 1977, the Club began accepting additional memberships, but only as “general members”, not as Board members. Four of the first general members were **Bob Green** (WB6JBL, believed to be the first general member), **Matt Zilmer** (WA6EGJ), **Cedric Brown** (N6BAX), and **Andre Thomas** (WB6ATJ), all of whom remain active today.

In mid-1978, NARC merged with another 220 MHz repeater group (WR6BBU) known at the time as REEA, the Radio-Electronics Enthusiasts Association, which consisted of about five amateurs. Three of those members remain active in the Club today: **Bill Ford** (WB6SNU), **Dick Vincent** (WA6BYJ), and **Lee Schwartz** (WB6HAV). Another REEA member, **Tom Gibson** (WB6HIS), remains a good friend of many Sunset members, but is no longer active in the group. By the end of 1978, the total membership of the merged Clubs was about 15. Several of these early members were old ham radio buddies from the early ’70s, and all were seriously interested in amateur radio VHF repeater communications. In fact, it could be said that this “Gang of 15” formed the character of the Club as it is today. This is the concept that the Club is interested in new members, but only those amateurs of good character, with some degree of technical capability and known good operating practices. Therefore, any potential new member must be recommended and sponsored by an existing member.

Also in 1978, the original repeater and its associated equipment (cavities, hardline, duplexer, etc.) was moved from Jay Hanawalt’s house to the 5300'-high Sunset Ridge site, near where the repeater is today. In those days, the repeater equipment was owned and controlled solely by the Board members, with user privileges extended to the general membership.

In the early days, monthly Club meetings were held at different members’ houses and, for about a six-month period, at a bank building in downtown Chino. Then, in 1978, a “permanent” meeting room was secured at the Alta Loma Recreation Center on Baseline Blvd., in the city of Rancho Cucamonga. This arrangement continued for several years, during which time overall membership grew to about 25 amateur radio operators. Some existing members who joined NARC as general members in the late ’70s and early ’80s include **Don Olejnik** (W6KAT), **Ralph Garneau** (WM6V), **Rick Norton** (WB2JIO), **Randy Groggin** (WD6DYA), **Bob Ahrens** (WA6SNG), and **Herb Younger** (W6OJA).

During this time, the Club provided radio communications for several “fun events”. These included Ontario Motor Speedway auto races and the first and only “Pig Run” to Calico ghost town by thousands of motorcycle-riding police officers.

An annual Club pool party was established in August 1982, and an annual Club Christmas party was established in 1987. And every 4th of July, since 1983, the Club has helped **Bob Burchett** (WB6SLC) set off fireworks at the University of Redlands. These events let Club members meet other members’ non-ham spouses and families, and lets members who have met over the radio “eyeball” each other.

Thanks to the efforts of Bill Ford (WB6SNU), the Club’s meeting place was moved in September 1984 to its present location at the Cable Airport after the city of Rancho Cucamonga decided to charge a fee for the use of its recreation center. The only “fee” paid to the airport is communications support for the annual air show held at Cable each January.

In late 1985, the Club decided that the “NARC” name no longer represented what the Club was all about, so the members voted to change it to “The Sunset Group”.

In the mid-80s, several Club members became interested in HF communications (for you VHFers, that’s 1.6 to 30 MHz). So, in 1986 the Club began holding its annual Field Day affair and, in 1987, joined the annual ARRL Sweepstakes contest.

Another phenomenon that grew significantly in the mid-80s was the growth in FCC-licenced husband-and-wife teams that used the repeater. Today, in addition to the typical technical discussions and emergency communications, the repeater is used frequently for more practical family contacts. It is interesting to note that many members prefer this direct means of communication over the autopatch, which has been available since the first repeater went on the air in 1976.

The original repeater served well, but after many months of technical and financial discussion, the Club decided in July 1986 to purchase a new repeater. The unit decided upon was a Micro Control Specialties Mark 4CR repeater and Mark 4C controller, for a cost of \$2600. This new repeater went on the air in its present location on Sunset Ridge in August 1986. A year later, the Club purchased the \$500 Multifax option, which provides the voice features of the system.

It is estimated that the present total value of the complete repeater package on Sunset Ridge is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$6000. All of it was either donated by Club members or bought with funds from the Club treasury. The important thing is that all of this equipment is equally owned by old and new Club members alike. To help with maintenance costs, a \$25 “buy-in” fee for new members was initiated in 1988 – a small price, it was felt, for part ownership of \$6000 worth of radio equipment. All members have an equal voice in the control and planning of the repeater system.

The many Club activities, frequent conversations of the member-owned repeater, and the Club’s monthly meetings have all contributed to a tight-knit group of new and old friends. Today, The Sunset Group has some 40 radio amateurs on its still-growing mailing list. Some are more active than others, and some contribute more than others. But all have one main element in common... a mutual interest in friendship through amateur radio!

1 January 1990  
Don Olejnik (W6KAT)

Transcribed late 1990s by Sunset Group member Randy Cassingham, KA6FDS (later K0RCC)

Contributed to the Internet Archive by K0RCC in October 2022. As of that time, all of the four founding members are believed to be deceased (SK/Silent Key). Others known as SK at this time are WB6JBL, N6BAX, W6KAT, WA6BYJ, and WA6SNG. Alas, there are probably others.